



Accessibility at Gloucestershire Archives

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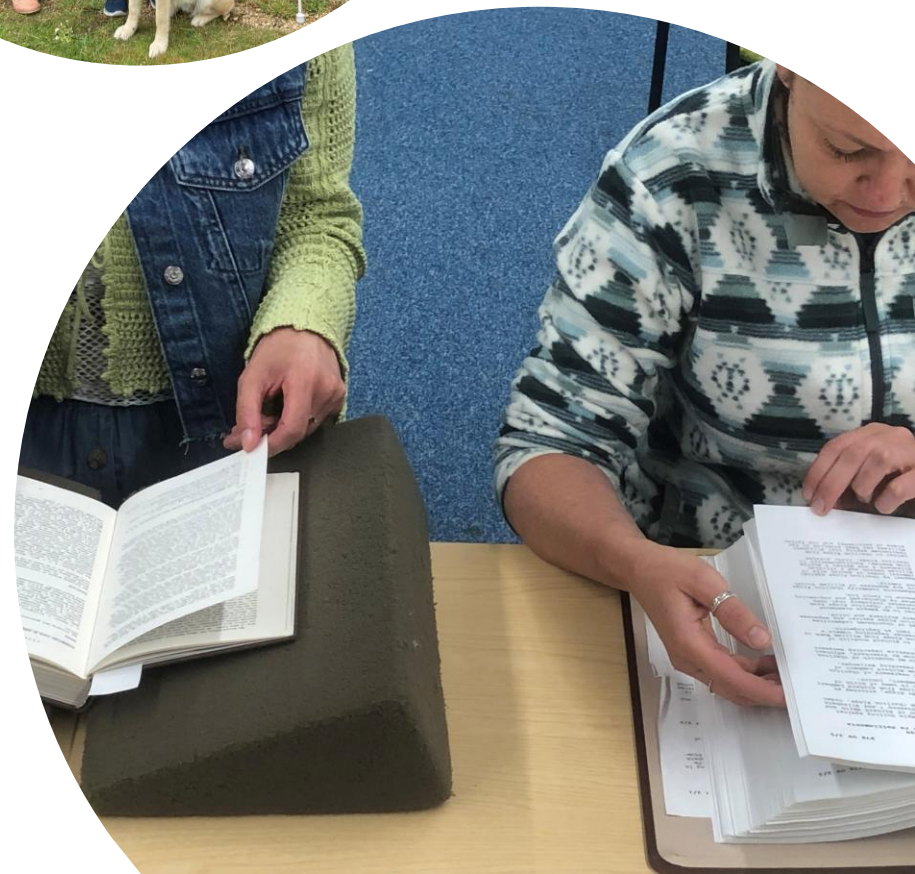
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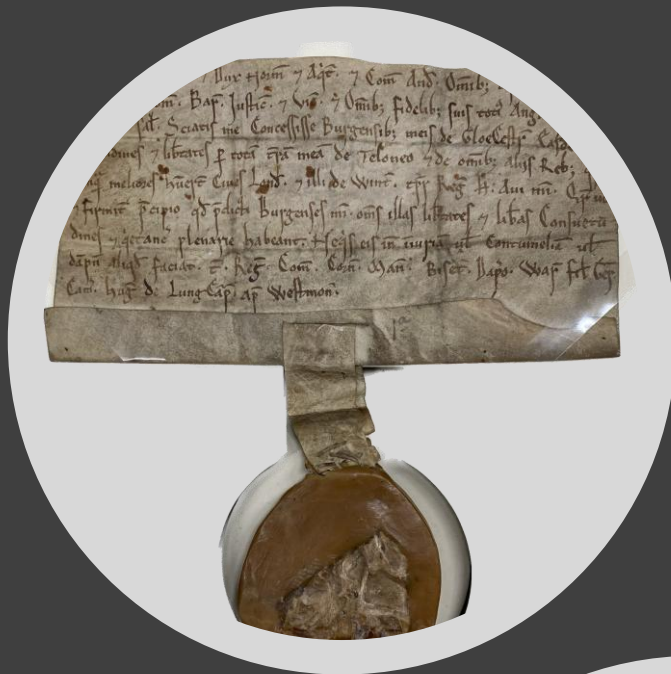
Jemma Fowkes, Community Heritage Officer

My role as Accessibility Champion:

- 1) to improve access to our services for those with disabilities, and,
- 2) to investigate what items we have in our collections relating to disability.

Please be aware that this presentation will deal with themes and historic language which could be considered upsetting and offensive today. There will be discussion of mental and physical health, illness, death, suicide & other sensitive areas.





About Gloucestershire Archives

- Part of Gloucestershire County Council
- We are based at the Gloucestershire Heritage Hub in Gloucester
- We collect and care for the records of Gloucestershire & South Glos
- We collect anything on paper!
- We have around 10 million records
- The oldest record is 900 years old
- The most recent is this year

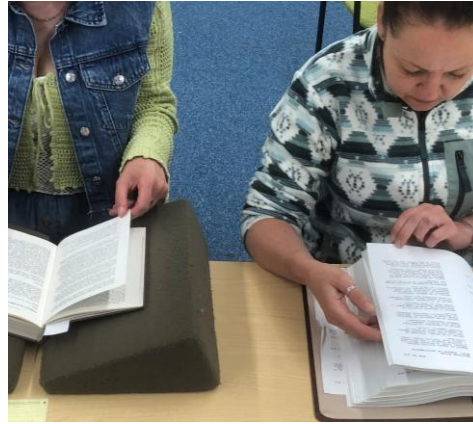




- 25 members of staff; 130 volunteers
- Large site: storage, offices, reception, lunch area, seachroom and Family History Centre, garden plus a conference suite
- Digital presence: 5% of collections digitised, websites, social media and online talks
- As well as visiting researchers, we work with local history/special interest groups & schools
- Lots of events

Improving access

- Physical access in the public areas: lift, level flooring, lighting, wheelchair access
- Training – county council courses, in-house training, external workshops
- Customer service: friendly, 1:1s, flexibility
- Collections: what we collect and how we sign post it
- Groups – neurodiverse art group, adult art group with learning disabilities, schools, nurses (mental health)
- Digital access - website



Blind & Visual Impairment Access

- Blind & Visual Impairment training for Customer Service Team
- Blind and Visual Impairment audit of the site
- Reading the Records workshops



Reading the Records with Gloucestershire Archives



Are you Blind or Visually Impaired?

Want to explore local & family history?

Want to handle historic records & learn how we care for them?

Join us for 6 free sessions supported by our friends at the Sight Loss Council & Gloucester Talking Newspaper

Venue: Gloucestershire Heritage Hub, Gloucester, GL1 3DW ~ FREE parking

Guide Dogs & Carers welcome ~ Refreshments provided

- Wednesday 1 October, 1-3pm: Welcome to Gloucestershire Archives
- Wednesday 8 October, 1-3pm: Treasures of Gloucestershire Archives
 - Wednesday 15 October, 1-3pm: Police Archives
 - Wednesday 22 October, 1-3pm: Sounds of the Archives
- Wednesday 29 October, 1-3pm: Exploring your Family History
- Wednesday 5 November, 1-3pm: Memories of School & Childhood

Book your space by contacting Gloucestershire Archives archives@gloucestershire.gov.uk

or call 01452 425295 & ask for Jemma or Helen

Gloucestershire
Archives
@the Hub

G T N

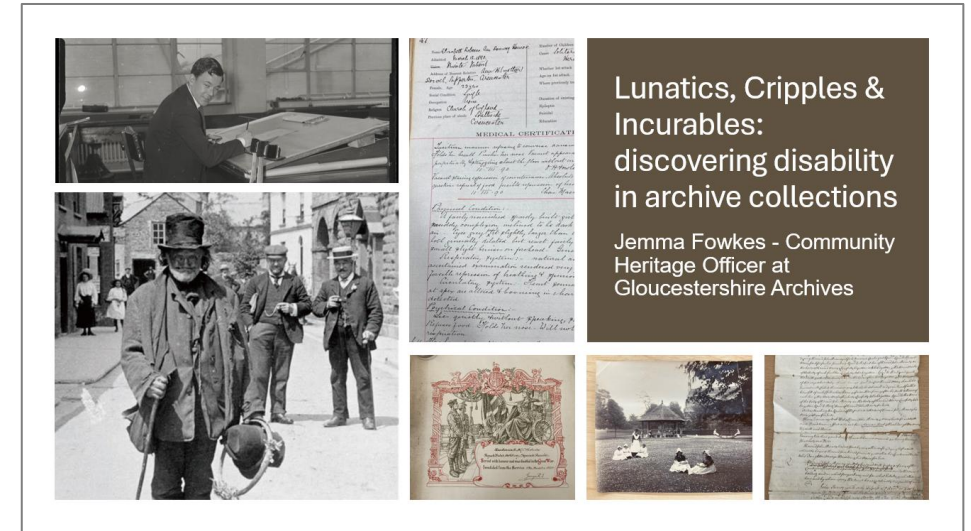
Sight Loss
Councils
A vision for change

Research into disability records

The aim of the research was to:

- Identify what records we hold relating to disability
- To look at what areas the records covered (and didn't)
- To explain to customers how to find and use the records themselves

The research has been conveyed in 2 talks and there will also be a help guide



Defining disability today



- 2021 census: ***“Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?”***
- Answering yes would class as being disabled.
- If yes, further questioned: ***“Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?”***
- In the 2021 census, for England, 17.7%, 9.8 million were classed as disabled
- In the South-West, approximately 7% were “limited a lot”
- Approximately 11% were “limited a little”

Are 17.7% of records in Gloucestershire Archives written by someone with a disability? How would we know?

Collections at Gloucestershire Archives

- 'Disability' brings up 85 hits on the Online catalogue
- Out of millions of records!



Heritage Hub > Archive Catalogue > Search > Results

All words ▾ disability 🔍

Date range: (1885 - 2010)

Collection

- ☐ Gloucester City Council (49)
- ☐ Gloucestershire County Council (6)
- ☐ Gloucester: 'Citizen' newspaper (5)
- ☐ Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (3)
- ☐ Dorey Group of Cheltenham, engineers (2)

See more...

Level

- ☐ Series (1)
- ☐ Sub-series (2)
- ☐ Item (7)
- ☐ No level (1)

Location of records

- ☐ Gloucestershire Archives (75)

Search results

Results per page: 50

Order by: Relevance

Archive records (75) Local studies (9) Index entries (2) Names (2) Places (2) Subjects (17)

Displaying 1 to 50 of 75

Item

Records of Gloucestershire Area Ramblers' Association collected by Antony ('Tony') John Drake MBE (1923-2012) > Papers related to highway operation and access > Acts and legislation D12676/4/1/19 ☆

Disability: 1997-1998

...Contains material related to **Disability** Discrimination Act 1995...

Series

Gloucester City Council > Council and committee meeting papers > Committee meetings papers DC/GL/C/2/43 ☆

Disability Equality Forum

Item

Gloucester City Council > Gloucester City Council > Box 15 DC144/Box 15 ☆

Disability Equality Forum, 1996

Item

Gloucester City Council > Gloucester City Council > Box 20 DC144/Box 20 ☆

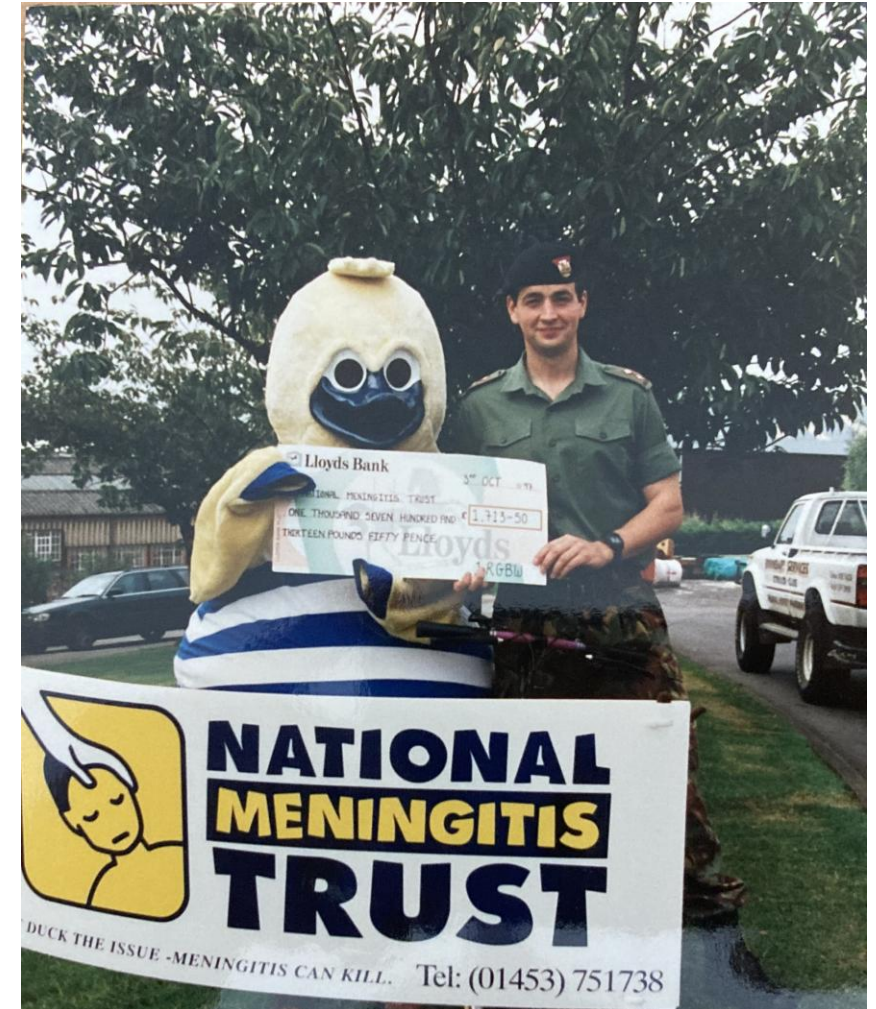
Disability Equality Forum, 1997-1998

Item

Gloucester City Council > Gloucester City Council > Box 30 DC144/Box 30 ☆

Why so few?

- Most of the records flagged with 'disability' come from the last 40 years.
- The move towards better provision and access has been well documented in council minutes and school records, hospital documents and in charity collections.
- Specific terms are more successful when searching, though modern terms like Neurodivergent and ADHD again only appear in very recent years.
- If you want to look up disabilities, it is easier to locate documents using the language of the time.



Noel Taylor, Gloucester Barracks, Oct 1992, Gloucester Citizen newspaper (Ref: D10638-2-13-41)

Best way to locate records on disabilities? Use historic terms

- Blind
- Cripple
- Deaf/deaf and dumb
- Defective
- Epilepsy/falling sickness
- Feeble-minded
- Fool
- Freak
- Idiot
- Imbecile
- Impotent
- Incurable
- Insane
- Lame
- Lunatic
- Mad/madhouse/mad doctor
- Mental deficiency/ mental handicap
- Moron
- Natural/natural fool
- Senile decay

6/4	Ditto	158	1	Berry Elijah	M 1 Nov 75	M	Lineer	Gen Setter
			2	Berry Annie L	F 30 June 46	M	Press Stamp Operator	
1/64	Ditto	159	1	Ruser George E.	M 22 June 13	S	Enamel Sign Printer	
2/64	Ditto	160	1	McCormack John	M 13 Jan 01	M	Paint Master	Master Car
			2	McCormack Lily	F 24 Feb 99	M	Domestic	Patricia
This record is officially closed.								
				McCormack Patricia	F 17 March 36	S	Under School Wk.	Blind Imbecile
This record is officially closed.								
4/64	Ditto	162	1	Markland George	M 22 June 78	M	Engineers	Labraver
			2	Markland Lily Ma	F 10 June 78	M	House	Wife

Image from the 1939 Register, a census created at the beginning of WWII. Patricia McCormack is described as “Blind Imbecile”

Ease of finding records

In terms of what you might find using these terms, records relating to disability can be divided roughly into two groups:

1. those *before* 1800,
and,
2. those which came *after* 1800



Above: A photograph of a child with smallpox, taken in Gloucester in 1896. (Ref. D9391)
Photography was not invented until the 1800s. But even once it became more common in the 1900s, there are few photographs which depict disability

Disability is often referenced because it is unusual or remarkable:

- Occasionally, a person's disability is referenced in parish records.
- In this register of burials for the parish of Lower Swell, the burial of Richard Watcraft in 1868 is listed. An additional note has been added:

***“Deaf and Dumb
Killed by a runaway horse”***

- Was this added because it was unusual/remarkable? The burial below also has a note listing a death by falling on a pitchfork ***“...a frightful death!”***
- Was being deaf and dumb believed to have had an impact on Richard's death?

(Ref. P322-IN-1-6)



Page 39.

BURIALS in the Parish of *Lower Swell*
in the County of *Gloucester* in the Year 18 *67-68*

Name	Abode	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
<i>Thomas Norris</i>	<i>Lower Swell</i>	<i>July 13</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>David Rogers</i>
<i>John Holman</i>	<i>Lower Swell</i>	<i>Jan^y 4</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Rev. W. B. Van der Meer</i>
<i>Emily Sarah Bolton</i>	<i>Lower Swell</i>	<i>Feb^y 1st</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>Rev. W. B. Van der Meer</i>
<i>James Tuckwell</i>	<i>Lower Swell</i>	<i>August 10th</i>	<i>92</i>	<i>David Rogers</i>
<i>Richard Watcraft</i>	<i>The Union Stron on Wold</i>	<i>Nov^y 7</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>Rev. W. B. Van der Meer</i>
<i>Isaac Holman</i>	<i>Stron Wold</i>	<i>Nov^y 15th</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>David Rogers</i>
<i>Elizabeth Gorton</i>	<i>Lower Swell</i>	<i>March 6</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Rev. W. B. Van der Meer</i>
<i>William Wilson</i>	<i>Lower Swell</i>	<i>April 30</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>David Rogers</i>

No. 308.

<i>Richard Watcraft</i>	<i>The Union Stron on Wold</i>	<i>Nov^y 7</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>Rev. W. B. Van der Meer</i>
<i>No. 309.</i>	<i>Deaf and Dumb</i>	<i>Stron on Wold</i>	<i>Nov^y 7</i>	<i>Rev. W. B. Van der Meer</i>
	<i>Killed by a runaway horse</i>			<i>Officiating Minister</i>

Disability is sometimes referenced in innovation:

Teaching the Deaf & Dumb Language

- These letters were written by James L Dighton in 1796. They were written to his sister “**for the benefit of her youngest daughter**”. His niece, Arabella, was deaf and dumb.
- James explains his methods of teaching the deaf and dumb language. James gives a very practical and detailed account: “...**putting the child’s finger again in your mouth, pronounce strongly the letter...with great force towards the palate...it produces a kind of smile very visible to the eye**”.

(Ref. D36-F19)

out Difficulty, & that of the
should you find yourself
this mechanism many times
heard against testifying the
then you have thus obtained
English a, b, c, & which
Child's finger again in
ance strongly that Letter
your Tongue in pronoun
er with great force towards
The Tongue spreads it
The Teeth on each side
kind of Smile very visible
Drawing the Child's finger
in her mouth & try to ins
near her Tongue in the sam
however very rarely succe
Pronunciation of this vowel
after long & repeated
each vowel having the
h. I. there is nothing so
the Pronunciation of that Letter

My Dear Betsy

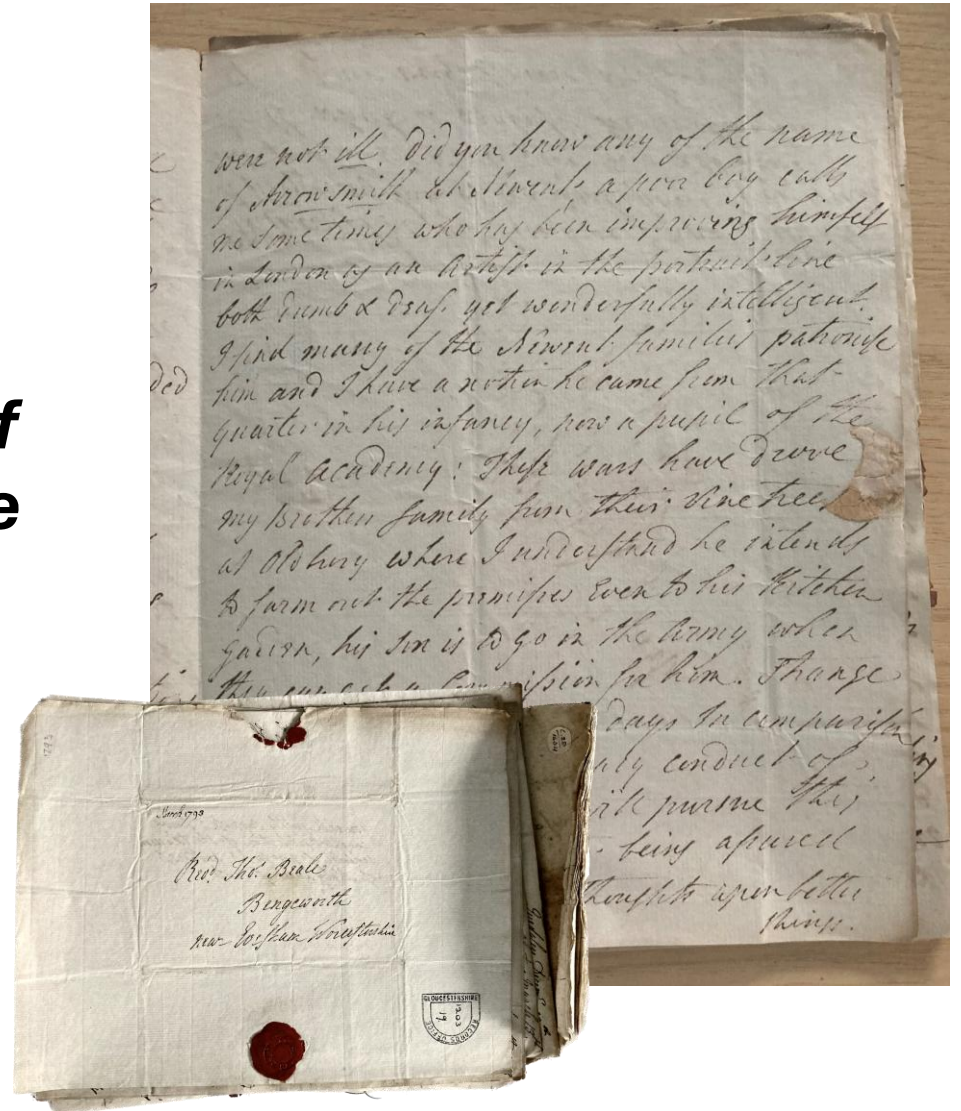
I am at length in pos
L'Epée's Work, entitled The teaching
the Deaf & Dumb, confirming
ad it, & I hasten to give you a
well knowing that your anxiety
can obtain some satisfactory
tional Hopes you may at last
of remedying, or at least of
ask, that Sense in which you
been left deficient by Nature
at I have run through, and
this genuine Testimony of
by the Life of the Author;
ss of Interest, devoted his
fortune to raise an unhappy
by Nature to a level
er. The Book is divided into
first, He leads the Pupil

Positive portrayals of disability can be found: Arrowsmith, Deaf and Dumb Artist from Newent

In a letter from Charles Hayward of Quedgeley to his cousin, the Rev. Thomas Beale, Hayward discusses a local artist:

“Did you know any of the name of Arrowsmith of Newent, a poor boy calls me sometimes who has been improving himself in London as an artist in the portrait line. [He is] both deaf and dumb, yet wonderfully intelligent. I find many of Newent families patronise him and I have a notion he came from that quarter in his infancy, now a pupil of the Royal Academy.”

(Ref. D1203-19)



A successful career?

- Thomas Arrowsmith, was born deaf and educated at home by his older brother, John. His brother published *The Art of Educating the Infant Deaf and Dumb*, which advocated the integration of deaf children into conventional schools.
- We know that Thomas attended the Royal Academy in 1788/9. The letter from Charles Hayward was written around this time.
- Here we can see one of his portraits, which was recently sold. The painting is dated to 1825, suggesting that being deaf did not prevent Thomas from leading a successful career as an artist.



Upsetting records relating to disability

- Sadly, records relating to suicide are often the main evidence we have of mental illness in the distant past.
- In this register of baptisms, marriages and burials for the parish of St Catharine, Gloucester in 1733 we have this record:

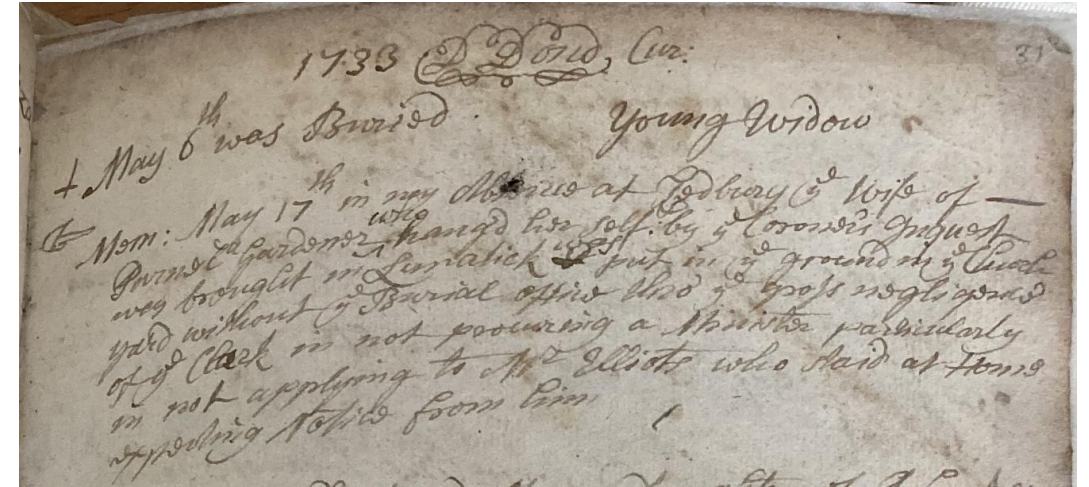
May 6th: was buried Young Widow

May 17th: in my Absence at Ledbury the Wife of Purnel, a Gardener, who hang'd herself by the Coroner's Inquest [meaning the inquest determined it was suicide by hanging]

Was brought in Lunatick & was put in the ground in the Church Yard without the Burial office thro' the gross negligence of the Clark in not procuring a Minister

Particularly in not applying to Mr Elliotts, who staid at Home expecting Notice from him

(Ref. P154-7-IN-1-1)



- All of which means that the woman was buried in the churchyard without a funeral service.
- It is likely that this was because suicides weren't supposed to be buried in consecrated ground. This might explain why the curate was not pleased when he found out.
- The reference to "brought in lunatick" presumably means that the coroner determined that she'd committed suicide while the balance of her mind was disturbed.
- And after all that they didn't even bother writing down her name.

Disability is sometimes used to sensationalise stories:

‘Crippled’ soldier

- The word “cripple” originally referred to someone who crept, limped, or was physically impaired. The word was recorded as early as 950 AD.
- Later it was used to describe a person with a physical disability, often unable to walk.
- Cripple continued to be used as a medical term until the second half of the 20th century.
- By the 1970s, the word came to be regarded as offensive.
- However, ‘crippled’ as an adjective is still being used here in the Gloucester Citizen in 1991.
- It is used to describe James Guthrie’s fight with the council over appropriate disability accommodation. Guthrie, an ex-bomb disposal expert was injured on duty.
- The use of crippled is likely being used to incur sympathy or to sensationalise the story.
- More recently, members of the disability rights movement have reclaimed words such as "cripple", "crip", and "gimp“.

Crippled soldier in housing battle

NEWS EXTRA

On display

HISTORIC gramophones and records will be on display in Cirencester next month. The exhibition at the Niccol Centre is being held to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the City of London Phonograph and Gramophone Society. Entrance is free and the show runs from September 2 to 7.

Shop damaged

BURGLARS who reversed a car through the window of a shop in Quedgeley sped off empty handed when they triggered an alarm. More than £600 worth of damage was caused by the attempted raid.

Selling fast

CHATSHOW host Des O'Connor will be appearing at Cheltenham's Everyman Theatre next week. Tickets are selling fast and can be obtained from the box office for £7. The August 25 show starts at 7.15pm.

Garage raid

LONGFORD sewage works employees smelled a rat when they found a garage broken into. Saws and drills worth £2,200 were stolen in the burglary.

CRIPPLED Gloucester Regiment soldier James Guthrie is fighting a battle with council chiefs to get out of his first floor flat.

The 31-year-old former Northern Ireland bomb disposal expert is now on ten types of medication including pain killers for a leg injury he suffered while on duty.

A long-awaited operation due next month, will confine him to a wheelchair which he will be unable to manoeuvre out the door or downstairs from his Crouch Court flat in Priors Park, Tewkesbury.

Mr. Guthrie, who is registered disabled and now receives army benefits while working as a paint sprayer, was decorated with two medals after serving the United Nations in Cyprus and at Greenham Common.

Desperate

"It makes me feel very bitter to serve my Queen and country and be treated like this, I cannot understand it," he said.

"It is desperate that I get somewhere in the next couple of weeks, otherwise I am going to have to cancel the operation."

His wife Joann (25) has suffered a nervous breakdown and, together with their two young children Cassandra (2) and Daniel (4), has bronchial asthmatic problems.

Tewkesbury Borough Council has offered the family a two-bedroom ground floor flat, but Mr. Guthrie says he is desperate to obtain a house for his family.

Twenty letters of support have arrived at the council from welfare and social services bosses and Cheltenham General Hospital while Mr. Guthrie has received one himself from Prime Minister John Major.

by Jane Riddiford

Priors Park councillor and leader of the Labour group Chris Burke, who has taken up his case, said Mr. Guthrie's card had been temporarily lost or withdrawn from the three-bedroom housing list and he could well have missed out on opportunities.

Council housing manager Hugh Aldridge said: "We're very sympathetic to his situation, he has medical priority and he's very well placed on the waiting list, but there are other deserving and needy cases."



■ James Guthrie with his medals, medication and letters of support.

Examples of how people managed with disabilities can be found: an early photograph of a wheelchair

- Wheelchairs have likely existed for thousands of years.
- The first self-propelled wheelchair was created in 1655, a long time before the bicycle was invented!
- This is Colonel Cracroft of Hackthorn & Harrington, c.1865, a military officer.
- The wheelchair he is using is a Bath wheelchair, named so because it was invented in Bath.
- The chair could also be pulled by a horse or donkey.

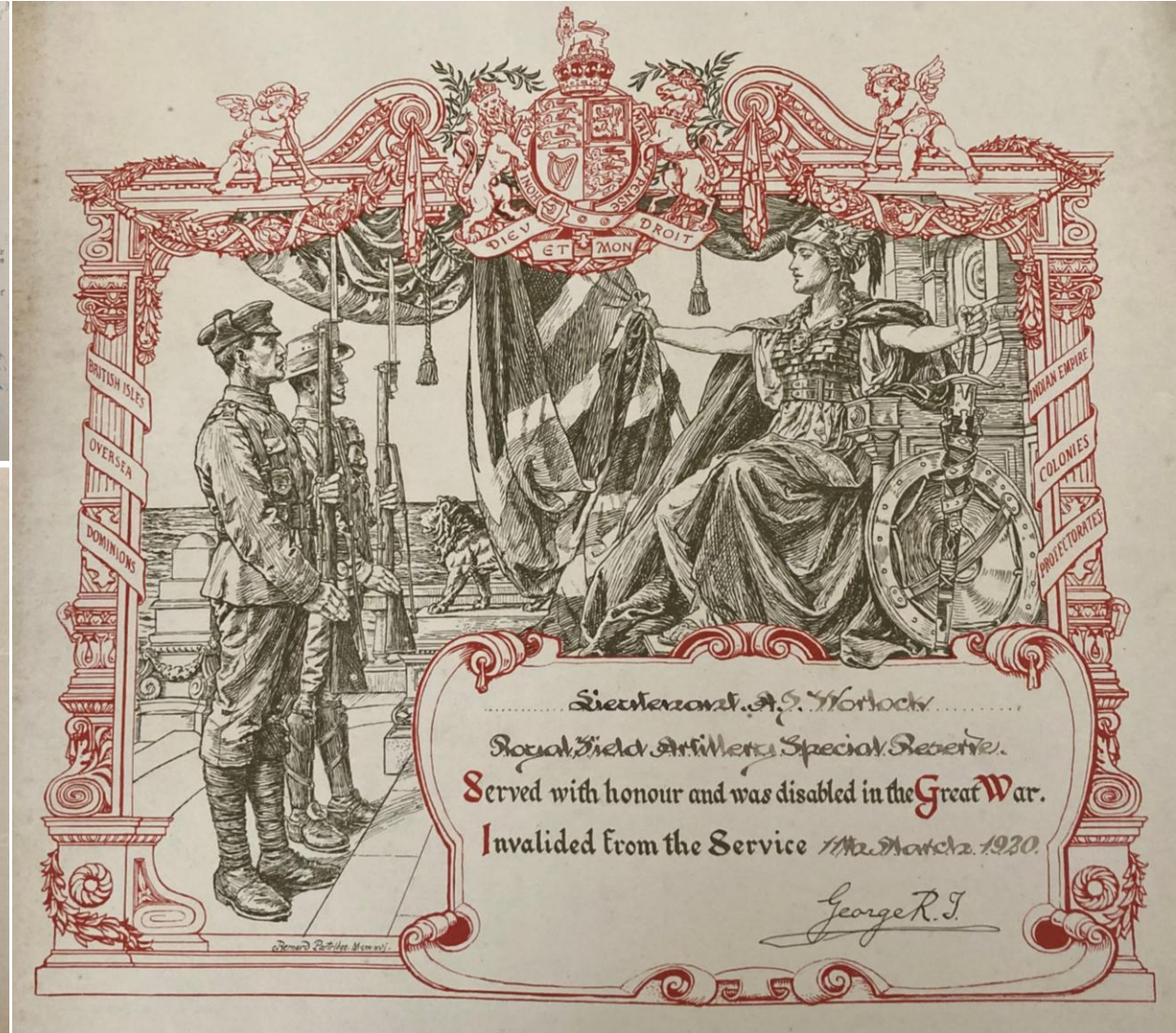
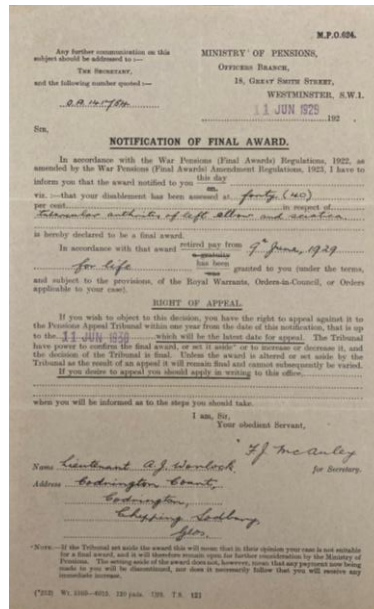
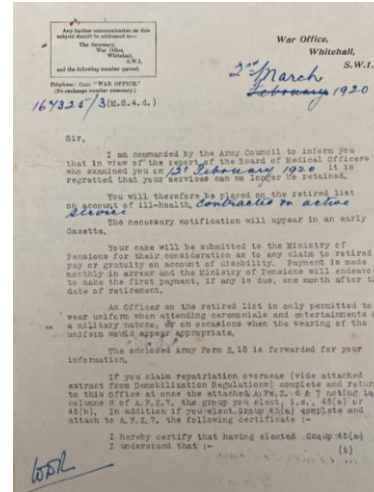
(Ref. P13/IN/4/6/1)



The records can indicate changes of attitudes towards disability: Disability and the First World War

- Throughout history, disabilities have often carried a stigma
- However, with 1.5 million soldiers returning from WWI wounded, attitudes changed
- Here we see the personal papers of Arthur Worlock, including his Disability Award and pension papers.
- Arthur was wounded whilst on active service. This resulted in arthritis of the left elbow and sciatica. He was retired from the military in 1920 as a result.

(Ref. D3979-11)



It is useful to see where current provision began: Special education provision

- In the past, children with disabilities were generally educated at home or not at all.
- Some children would have attended local schools, but they are rarely mentioned.
- Laws changed towards the end of the 1800s and schools were required to identify pupils with special education needs, initially those who were blind and deaf.
- In paperwork from Cheltenham Union in 1897, we can see evidence of this.
- The information included the children's current places of education, including the Home for Blind Children in Liverpool.
- As there were no education institutions in Gloucestershire for children with disabilities at the time, many went to schools outside the county.



Copy of Return and to Department 9/19/97.

Schedule to Circular 398.

Cheltenham Urban District Council.

N.B.—Enter Blind Children and Deaf Children separately, beginning with the Blind Children. If the space provided is insufficient, the Return may be continued on additional sheets.

Name of Child.	Whether Blind or Deaf.	Age last Birthday.	Address of Parent or Guardian.	Name of Certified School attended by Child.	If Child does not attend a Certified School, reasons for non-attendance.
John Blackwell	Blind	5		Home for Blind Children, 52 & 56, Devonshire Road, Liverpool.	
Clara Ann James	Blind	15	George James 96 Templeway Road	None	She has been taught privately by a Lady
Beatrice Annie	Blind	9	Fredrick Arnold 2 Ripon Place, Brindley Road		Suffers from Spinal Affection. Unable to attend School in consequence
E. A. Quincy	Deaf	14	Amey Quincy 26 Colchester St.	Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Sydenham Park, Bristol	
Marion Smith	Deaf	14	Thomas May Smith Gordon Terrace	None	None
Irene Davis	Deaf	7	Charles Davis Victoria St. Faversham	Alphington Infants School (elementary)	
Charles Walter Smith	Deaf	13	Thomas May Smith	Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, Sydenham Park, Bristol	
Annie Adelaide	Deaf	12	Gordon Terrace	None	None
John May	Deaf	10	"	None	None
F. F. Pater	Deaf	"	"	None	None

10th September, 1897.

(Since date of return have left Institution.)

Signed E. J. B. Jones
Clerk to the District Council,
and Clerk to the School Attendance Committee.

(Ref. CRB-C3-2-5-2-5)

Some disabilities are much harder to identify than others: witches, ghosts & the supernatural?



- Mental illness can be harder to find in the earlier records
- Records relating to supernatural experiences may be evidence of mental illness and disorders, such as psychosis and epilepsy.
- In this series of papers collected between 1698 and 1705, we read about a variety of apparitions, miracles, prophecies and witchcraft, recorded in different hands.
- Might they tell us something about how mental illness was perceived at the time?

(Ref. D3549-6-2-4)



We can occasionally see both the language & the meaning of disability changing over time: government censuses

- From 1841, there was a census every 10 years providing information about UK individuals.
- From the 1851 census, the form included a column: **“whether Blind or Deaf and Dumb”**.
- This was extended to **“1. Blind 2. Deaf and Dumb 3. Imbecile or Idiot 4. Lunatic”** in later censuses.
- By 1911, the column was named **‘infirmary’**.
- In this 1901 census for Westbury-on-Severn, William Whittington, aged 23, is labelled an **“imbecile”**.
- By the 19th century, imbecile was used as a medical term.
- This would be defined as a severe learning disability today.

Administrative County - *Wiltshire*

The undermentioned Houses are situated within the boundaries of the

Page 8

Civil Parish	Ecclsiastical Parish	County Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District	Ward of Municipal Borough or Urban District	Rural District	Parliamentary Borough or Division	Power of Sanction (if any)	Power of Sanction (if any)
WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN	WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN	WESTBURY-ON-SEVERN					
HOUSE	ROAD, STREET, &c. and No. or NAME of HOUSE	Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Age last Birthday	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	Employer, Worker, or Own account	WHERE BORN
1	Clement's Cottage	George Lane	Head	51	Cattleman on farm	Worker	Glos. Newton
		Margaret do	Wife	45	do	Worker	Glos. Newton
		William do	Son	18	do		do
		Henrietta do	Daughter	10	do		do
2	Pinchell's Farm	Charles Barnwell	Head	52	Labourer on farm	Worker	Wiltshire. Basingstoke
		Harriet do	Wife	44	do		do
		Edward do	Son	16	do		do
3	Broadway Cottage	Henry Morgan	Head	75	Labourer on farm	Worker	Glos. Newton
		Ann do	Wife	65	do	own account	do
4	do	Frank Morgan	Son	12	do		do
5	do	Ann do	Wife	56	do		do
6	do	James Wood	Head	61	Coachman for Council	Worker	Glos. Newton
		Harriet do	Wife	61	do		do
		Edith Mitchell	Daughter	10	do		do
7	do	Samuel Paddy	Head	38	Coachman	Worker	do
		Richard Paddy	Son	57	Fisherman	Worker	do
		Mary Jane do	Wife	38	do		do
		Clara do	Daughter	12	do		do
		Walter do	Son	10	do		do
		Frederick do	Son	5	do		do
		Agnes do	Daughter	3	do		do
		Arthur do	Son	2	do		do
8	do	William Whittington	Head	23	Labourer	Worker	Glos. Newton
		Elizabeth do	Wife	53	do		do
		William do	Son	23	do		do
		Alfred do	Son	18	do		do
		Mary Ann Annott	Head	58	do		do
Total of Males and of Females...				1513			

NOTE—Draw your pen through such words of the headings as are inapplicable.

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE REFERENCE :- RG 13/2417

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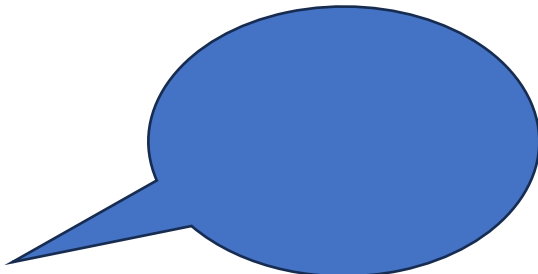
ON SCALE 1 2 3 4 5 6

William Whittington	Head	M	23	Labourer	Worker	Glos. Newton
Elizabeth do	Wife	M	53	do		do
William do	Son	S	23	do		do
Alfred do	Son	S	18	do		do
Mary Ann Annott	Head	M	58	do		do

Imbecile

The records are very limited when it comes from hearing from those with disabilities

- The letters seen here are a rare survival of a patient's voice
- The letters were written James Richard Amphlett Matthews. James was a patient at Barnwood Mental Asylum from 1902 to 1903.
- James was a 45-year-old manufacturer with no previous mental health issues. He had been a **“quiet, even-tempered”** man until 5 days before admission.
- His symptoms included rapid and incoherent speech, maniacal laughter, threatening violence against previous employers and wife, paranoia and delusions, lack of attention
- Physical health good except a hernia
- Cause: **“overwork”**
- Given sedatives



James Matthew's letters

The letters were written from James to Dr Soutar, his Doctor. Dr Soutar commented on James' letters in the case notes:

“The letters which have been inserted show very well the confused and rambling state of the patient's mind...”

(Ref. D3725-1-190-2-8 + 7)



When the records are present, they do not always offer the insight you might hope for

When greek meets greek
Matthews & Soutar
Then comes the tug, of war

1303
Wants to be free
1-1-03
Hopes you'll agree
RSVP =
"Houray, Hourar"
"Hip, hip, -" -"
"You are, you are"
"J. G. Soutar" (signed)

Promises are not made,
Like pie-crusts to be broken.
"heads are in war-fair"
doctor Soutar

Our program will be
Carried out, like me
- " - " - " - "
Our program shall be
- " - secret you see
Signed: - J. G. Soutar
And Matew RA
Couple of brothers
Well meant, well met

Still, in spite of all that's been written, said & done:
Doctor, understand
I'll not force your hand
I have too much sense!
I hope to act sense
And non-sense no more.
For ever and ever more
To study bible lore!
Daedalus
Dead, allus (always)
To evil wishes
Too bad, which is (witches)

I might go on, for ever.
Man may come & man may go
But I go on, for ever!
However I don't want to
be a tease. If you want
to tease me, put 2 ts in
"Matthews"

Yours sincerely
J. R. A. Matthews.
D. H. R.
Don't be rude
Know (no) I won't!

When Greek meets Greek
Matthews [James Matthews is the
patient and writer] & Soutar [James
Matthews' doctor]
Then come the tug, of war

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Ded, allus [?] (always)
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- " secret you see
Signed:- J G Soutar
J R A Matthews brother Drs

Doctors Rat vols
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J R A Matthews

D B R
Don't be rude
Know (no) I won't!

In summary

- Only a tiny percentage of our records mention disability or are written by a self-identifying disabled person
- The best way to locate disability records is through historic terms
- Being blind, deaf, unable to walk or having epilepsy have historically been recognised as disabilities
- Disabilities such as Bipolar, ADHD, Autism and Dementia can be recognised in records via descriptions but were identified differently
- Some disabilities do not seem to have existed in the past, such as Schizophrenia and AIDS
- Some were far less prevalent, such as Dementia; others have all but disappeared such as General Paralysis of the Insane (Syphilis)
- Attitudes have changed over time, sometimes with opposite ideas co-existing.
- Records can be frustratingly limited, especially in conveying the voices of those directly affected



Nonetheless, there are avenues for us to explore if we want to know more about the lives of those with disabilities, especially from the 1800s onwards.

Researching records of disability from the past will help us to improve, broaden and signpost future collections



Top: Female patients seated on the lawn at Horton Road First County Asylum, c.1890 (Ref. HO22-27-3)

Left: Injured soldiers at Arle Court, a WWI military hospital. Taken between 1915 and 1918 (Ref. D15682-2)

What's next for Gloucestershire Archives?

- Applying for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund
- This will focus on all aspects of accessibility, from cataloguing to customer service to outreach
- Watch this space!

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